

November 19, 2023

Abide: Mission (John 15)

Continue the mission of Jesus at Covenant Grove.

Hook – Sent (7min)

- Welcome (online), Notes and app
- I want to answer a question many people have asked me, “Why are you going?” I wasn’t seeking it, but I got an email asking me to pray and consider. It was a hard decision because this is such a great church with such a big heart for the mission of God. But the Lord made His direction for me clear, and once that happened – I chose to follow Him.
- My heart has always been to help people get closer to Christ.
 - o John 15:5 – the fruit is not numbers. It is being closer to Christ.
 - o Numbers come because the whole world wants the love, joy, and peace of Christ!
- My mentors helped unlock the mission and growing gifts inside of me.
 - o In Chicago, my youth group started with 1 youth – but it grew to 10.
 - o In MN, we started with 30 and grew to 100.
 - o In Orange County, we went from 20 to 120.
 - o Modesto Cov – 50 to 175.
 - o Covenant Grove – a heart for the lost, a heart for the lukewarm to get on fire, a heart for disciples to become disciple makers (leaders). Hundreds of lives.
- Most churches are not growing.
 - o Jesus said, “look at the fields, they are ripe for harvest.”
- 140 churches in Northwest Conference.
 - o Part of my job is leadership development – and I want to help leaders have a heart for the lost.
 - o Post-pandemic has been called the “Great Dechurching.” 40% of people have stopped attending church in the last 5 years. This has made a big difference in our communities and mental health.
- Church planting has stalled – one of three key values, but none in last two years.
 - o They need a catalytic leader – and this conference used to plant 5-7 churches per year. That means thousands of people reached for the gospel.
 - o They needed someone who has ideas for church planting – stuff I wrote about in my book and have learned in the last few years as a coach and leader in the church planting world.
 - o Important that I pastored – and we planted a church – through the pandemic – and continued to grow.
- These are just some strategic reasons, but THE reason is the call of Jesus. The mission is to help people get closer to Christ.
 - o I am going to do that mission in MN now.
 - o You get to continue that mission here.
 - o Same mission – different locations.

“To transform religious and irreligious people into Fully Devoted Followers of Christ.”

*We are a church on mission for the lost, hurting, and in need.
(15min)

- John 15:5, 16-17, 18-27

⁵“Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.

¹⁶You didn’t choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. ¹⁷This is my command: Love each other.

¹⁸“If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. ¹⁹The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you. ²⁰Do you remember what I told you? ‘A slave is not greater than the master.’ Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you. And if they had listened to me, they would listen to you. ²¹They will do all this to you because of me, for they have rejected the one who sent me. ²²They would not be guilty if I had not come and spoken to them. But now they have no excuse for their sin. ²³Anyone who hates me also hates my Father. ²⁴If I hadn’t done such miraculous signs among them that no one else could do, they would not be guilty. But as it is, they have seen everything I did, yet they still hate me and my Father. ²⁵This fulfills what is written in their Scriptures: ‘They hated me without cause.’

²⁶“But I will send you the Advocate—the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will testify all about me. ²⁷And you must also testify about me because you have been with me from the beginning of my ministry.

- The mission will be hard.

- Would be nice to stop at v.17 – we don’t want to go into a world that hates us.
 - That’s why so many Christians don’t live the mission. It’s HARD!
 - We follow Jesus – who lived the hard mission.
 - In 2012, people wanted me to speak on politics and take sides. I listened, and preached on Amos – what did the Bible say about faith, leadership, immigration, and power? Let’s live that.
 - In the pandemic, I refused to take sides on politics or masks – the focus is on the mission. We refused to have our Life Groups become political chat rooms. That made both sides mad at me. That was tough, but we didn’t lose the mission.
- We LOVE in the face of HATE – because that is what Jesus did.
 - “The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. ... Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.” Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
 - “Christianity is not a matter of persuasiveness but of true greatness when it is hated by the world.” Ignatius of Antioch (*Romans*, iii.3)

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- ***Mission Habits**

- “You are what you continually do.”
- Covenant Grove doesn’t just talk about mission – we practice it over and over and over again.
 - Imagine a little sprout – you can pull it up easily. A shrub not so easily. A tree with roots – very hard to remove.
 - Live the mission of God – with your **HABITS**.
- **FDFC*DFM – 7 habits!**

- **Evangelism – be a witness**

- On our Launch Team, we were supposed to all be inviting others – but we were all scared and terrible at it (even me). We grew from 46...to 44. That was a wakeup call, and we began asking the question every week. That changed everything, and we began growing.
- Post-pandemic – the church stopped inviting others. I did too. But then my Supply Lines challenged me to live the mission. The first person I invited was my HVAC guy...and it was rough! But that sparked a fire that has continued.
- **BLESS**
 - Begin with prayer. Pray every day for opportunities – God will answer the prayer.
 - Listen – give God 15 minutes a day to listen to people, then pray with them.
 - Eat together, Serve in Love, Share your story – WILL YOU?

- **Impact – serving outside the church**

- Serve your neighbors, family, friends.
- Love Modesto, Fight Hunger – big serving events.
- Life Groups – in groups, a few times a year.
 - *This leads to our church serving 20-30 projects per year!*
- In your neighborhood or our town – coaching, tutoring, Gospel Mission, and more. What are the needs you see?
- Serving people’s needs is a habit and way of living – just look at Jesus.
 - Once a year is a good start but bad destination.

Punch – Even Greater Things (7min)

- This has always been a church on the mission of God – willing to do anything short of sin to reach people who are not walking with Jesus in community. Only 13% of people in Stan County go to church on a given Sunday – and that was pre-Covid. The need is HUGE.
- There have been times when it has been hard to stay on mission.
 - When we started, we didn’t have anywhere available to meet. I called every rental and school in the area – no one called back. Then I finally asked for help – Pastor

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- Mark at MCC talked to some people, and one day later I got the call from Enochs. God's mission.
- Then when we got asked to leave Enochs, I knew that this was the Lord's church and mission – He would solve the problem, and I wasn't going to stress. Our church trusted the Lord to find a rental for us, on Sunday mornings, on this side of town – even when it seemed impossible. God did! Orchard Elementary became available. We moved – and prayed – and ate (of course)!
 - Just a few months later, this property became available, but we had to raise \$150,000 in three months – which was half our budget. I wasn't worried – this is God's church and mission.
 - The verse we used, "I will do something in your day that you would not believe, even if you were told." Hab 1:5
 - The Lord raised \$165,000 in two months, we moved into this Building, and over 100 new people joined our church family – and we went to two services.
 - Then we began praying and planning for a new building campaign – called Building Hope. We launched it not knowing the future, but trusting in the Lord. Covid happened but people kept giving sacrificially – including my family.
 - We have done a lot of work, and have plans ready if this church can continue the mission and invite more people. Mission.
 - This also is something that can help draw a pastor to Modesto – this is a generous, mission-minded church that wants to grow.
 - God sending me to MN has not changed the mission.
 - The Lord has even greater things in store.
 - I know this church – the leaders and the people – you won't back down...you are going to step up and live the mission.
 - It has been my honor to be your pastor and leader. I am so proud of you. I can't wait to see what God will do through you. I love you all!

Prayer

Benediction – John 15:5

- Invite others
- Prayer Team available